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MAINE  
CHARTER  
SCHOOL  
COMMISSION

2016

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# Maine Charter School Commission

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Maine Charter School Commission site  
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Department of Education Charter Schools  
<http://maine.gov/doe/charterschools>

## **Maine Public Charter Schools:**

Baxter Academy for Technology and  
Science  
54 York Street, Portland 04101  
[www.Baxter-Academy.org](http://www.Baxter-Academy.org)

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences  
16 Prescott Lane, Hinckley 04944  
[www.Means-gwh.org](http://www.Means-gwh.org)

Cornville Regional Charter School  
1192 West Ridge Road, Cornville 04976  
[www.CornvilleRegionalCharterSchool.org](http://www.CornvilleRegionalCharterSchool.org)

Maine Connections Academy  
75 John Robert's Road, Suite 11B  
South Portland 04106  
[www.MaineConnectionsAcademy.com](http://www.MaineConnectionsAcademy.com)

Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science  
25 Shaker Road, Gray 04039  
[www.Fiddleheadschool.org](http://www.Fiddleheadschool.org)

Maine Virtual Academy  
6 Chestnut Street, Augusta 04333  
[www.mainevirtual.org](http://www.mainevirtual.org)

Harpswell Coastal Academy  
9 Ash Point Road Harpswell 04079  
[www.HarpswellCoastalAcademy.org](http://www.HarpswellCoastalAcademy.org)

## Table of Contents

What is a Maine Public Charter School?	3
What is the Maine Charter School Commission?	4
Maine's Public Charter Schools	5
Chapters, Laws, Rules & Statutes Applicable to Maine Charter Schools	8
Laws that Apply to Maine Public Charter Schools	9
Impact of Other Laws and Requirements	10
Public Charter School Funding	11
Frequently Asked Questions	14

## What is a Maine Public Charter School?

**C**harter schools are public schools of choice students can decide to attend as an alternative to traditional public schools.

In 2011, when Public Law 2011, Chapter 414 took effect, Maine became the 41st state to allow public charter schools.

Maine's first public charter schools opened in the 2012-13 school year. Seven Maine public charter schools are currently in operation, with two more opening for the 2016-2017 school year.

Charter schools are publicly funded schools governed and operated independently of the traditional public school system. They have more flexibility than traditional public schools over decisions concerning curriculum and instruction, scheduling, staffing and finance. Charter schools; however, are accountable to the terms of the contracts, or charters, that authorize their existence and the academic standards to which all other public schools are accountable.

Each Maine charter school must be authorized by a charter school authorizer – either the seven-member Maine Charter School Commission formed under Maine's charter school law, a local school board or a group of school boards.

## What is the Maine Charter School Commission?

The Maine Charter School Commission was created by Public Law 2011, Chapter 414, to authorize and monitor up to 10 public charter schools in Maine in the first 10 years (2012-2022). The statute provides guidance for the Commission on the content of applications that must be filed by charter school founders; the execution of a charter school contract with the charter school's governing board; the oversight of charter schools it has authorized including academic and operational accountability, analysis of data provided to the Commission by the charter school and monitoring legal compliance with all applicable Federal, State and Charter School laws, rules and regulations.

The Maine Charter School Commission consists of seven members appointed by the State Board of Education for three-year terms. Three members must be members of the State Board of Education. These three members shall nominate the other four members; the four must be approved for the Commission by a majority vote of the State Board of Education.

In addition to fulfilling its statutory obligations, the Maine Charter School Commission provides information to the public regarding charter schools in Maine.

### Mission:

The mission of the Maine Charter School Commission is to allow charter schools to be established as public schools that improve pupil learning by creating more high quality schools with high standards for pupil performance; that close achievement gaps between high-performing and low-performing groups of public school students; that increase high-quality educational opportunities within the public education system; that provide alternative learning environments for students who are not thriving in traditional school settings; that create new professional opportunities for teachers and other school personnel; that encourage the use of different, high-quality models of teaching and other aspects of schooling; and that provide students, parents, community members and local entities with expanded opportunities for involvement in the public education system.

## Maine Public Charter Schools

### **Acadia Academy**

ACADIA, A Charter Academy for Developing Independence and Achievement opening for the 2016-2017 school year, will provide a rigorous, comprehensive educational program for children of the Lewiston/Auburn area in grades pre-k through 2, with plans to expand through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. ACADIA will promote high educational achievement through directed teaching opportunities that are entwined with extensive experiential learning opportunities. ACADIA faculty and staff will support the development of the whole child as each student develops academically, socially and emotionally in a safe community that requires personal accountability and meaningful participation. It is our intent to support our individual students in developing their full potential, while teaching them the value of belonging, connectedness and contribution to our larger community.

### **Baxter Academy for Technology and Science**

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science, located in Portland, opened its doors in September 2013. The school's students come from 42 Maine school districts, spanning Blue Hill to South of Kennebunk. Its curriculum is rooted in inquiry and project-based learning, and is connected across subjects. Baxter's mission is to be a rigorous, college preparatory high school promoting student ownership of

learning through a curriculum focused specifically on science, technology, engineering, and math. Its vision is to use a technology-rich, project-based learning approach to education at the secondary level.

### **Cornville Regional Charter School**

Cornville Regional Charter School, located in Cornville, was the first elementary public charter school in the state of Maine, opening its doors on October 1, 2012, to students in grades K-6. Currently, the school educates students from 6 Maine school districts from St. Albans to Fairfield and points in between. The school's mission is to create a safe, respectful, nurturing and active learning community where every child is given the opportunity to thrive academically, to be accepted, to celebrate accomplishments and to develop a lifetime love of learning. Its vision is to create a school where learning is built around each student so that he/she become engaged learners with relevant and challenging work.

**MYTH:** Public Charter schools do not have to meet the same educational standards as traditional public district schools.

**FACT:** While Public charter schools are allowed to innovate, they are also required to meet the same educational standards and Maine Learning Results as traditional public district schools, as well as contracted requirements of the authorizer.

## **Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences**

Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences, located in Gray, opened its doors in September 2013. The school's students come from 16 Maine school districts from Portland to Rumford. Its curriculum is based on the Reggio Emilia learning approach; Image of the child; children's relationship and interactions within a system; role of the families; role of space; and teacher and children as partners in learning. Fiddlehead's mission is to unfold the potential of children, in a respectful, loving culture through authentic and meaningful experiences that sustain a sense of wonder a love of learning and embrace the interconnectedness of all things. Its vision is to provide for the foundational needs of growing children in a community where children, teachers, and families learn together in a nurturing environment.

## **Harpswell Coastal Academy**

Harpswell Coastal Academy located in Harpswell, opened its doors in September 2013. Currently, the school serves students from Portland to Wiscasset with students from 13 Maine school districts currently attending. Its curriculum is based on incorporating marine and natural resources, farms and forests, and sustainable entrepreneurship often through direct and ongoing partnerships with professionals in those fields. The school's mission is to offer rigorous, personalized, project-based education to mid-coast Maine students. Its vision is to use Maine's shorelines, working waterfronts,

forests, and farms as classrooms. The goal is to prepare caring, creative, resilient citizen-scholars who will flourish in a rapidly changing economy.

## **Maine Academy of Natural Sciences**

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences (MeANS), located in Hinckley, opened its doors in September 2011, and was the first Maine high school to focus on the natural sciences. Currently, the school educates students from 25 Maine school districts from Portland to Athens. Its mission is to offer the public a student centered, staff guided high school whose purpose is to inspire and engage students. MeANS welcomes a diverse range of students including those whose previous learning environment has not inspired them to fulfill their potential as learners, those who have become profoundly disconnected from their education as well as those who have a passion for the school's themes of agriculture, forestry and sustainability. Its vision is to encourage students to re-engage with their education. They will grow as critical thinkers and problem solvers by developing habits of heart and mind that lead them to take responsibility for their own actions, as well as for the welfare of their community.

**MYTH:** Charter schools are private schools.

**FACT:** Charter schools are public schools. A charter school is a public school and is part of the state's system of public education.

Maine Public Charter Schools:

- must be nonreligious and tuition-free;
- may not require entrance exams;
- must accept all students up to enrollment capacity.



### **Maine Connections Academy**

Maine Connections Academy, located in South Portland, opened in September 2014 as Maine's first virtual public charter school. Currently, Maine Connections Academy educates students from 96 school districts statewide. The curriculum combines online and offline resources working with specialists to deliver comprehensive, high quality education. The school's mission is to help each student maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program in grades 7-12 for students who need an alternative to the traditional classroom. Its vision is to reach students for whom a cutting-edge virtual approach provides the very best pathway to school success through a uniquely individualized learning program that combines the best in virtual education with very real connections among students, family, teachers, and the community to promote academic and emotional success for every learner.

### **Maine Virtual Academy**

Maine Virtual Academy, located in Augusta, opened in September 2015 as the second virtual public charter school in Maine. Currently, Maine Virtual Academy educates students from 99 school districts all over the state of Maine. Its curriculum is based upon the teaching affiliated with the K-12 Inc. online program. It offers courses in Language Arts/English, Math, Science, History, Art, Health/PE and Music. The school's mission is to develop each student's full potential

with learner-centered instruction, a research-based curriculum and educational tools and resources to provide a high quality learning experience for grade 7-12 students in need of alternative educational options. Maine Virtual Academy's vision is to be the leading 21st century public charter school in Maine improving students learning outcomes through individualized instruction, as evidenced by student academic proficiency, student academic growth, post-secondary readiness, and the demonstration of skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and self-direction.

### **Snow Pond Arts Academy**

Snow Pond Arts Academy, located in Sidney, will open for the 2016 school year. Snow Pond Arts Academy is a performing arts charter high school that integrates the power of the arts with a rigorous academic experience. Snow Pond Arts Academy (SPAA) will open with 9th or 10th grade in the fall of 2016, with grades 11 and 12 being added in subsequent years. The performing arts curriculum in music, theatre and dance will include: lessons, technique classes, small and large group ensembles, comprehensive courses in theory, history, and more.

**MYTH:** Charter schools do not provide special education services.

**FACT:** Public charter schools must follow the same federal and state requirements to provide special education services as other public district schools.



## Chapters, Laws, Rules & Statutes Applicable to Maine Charter Schools

Public Law 2011, Chapter 414 Maine's Public Charter School Law (Effective 9-28-11)

05-071 Department of Education Chapter 140 Public Charter Schools  
(Adopted 12-2-12)

Maine Education and School Statutes  
Title 20-A: Education Chapter 112: Public Charter Schools

### Maine Charter School Commission

*Chapter 1 – Commission Organization and Operation* (Effective June 16, 2013)  
This rule describes the organization and operation of the Commission.

*Chapter 2 – Procedures for Commission Authorization of Public Charter Schools*  
(Effective May 1, 2012; Amended June 16, 2013)

This rule sets forth the process by which the Maine Charter School Commission solicits, accepts and reviews applications for the formation of public charter schools. The rule also sets forth the performance indicators that will be used as the performance framework for any approved application and minimum requirements for a sound charter contract in the monitoring and compliance of the contracted public charter schools.

*Chapter 3: Procedures for Charter School Renewal* (Effective June 23, 2014)

This rule sets forth the process by which the Maine Charter School Commission decides whether to renew the charter of a public charter school according to Maine Revised Statutes Title 20-A Chapter 112 § 2411 Charter Term and Renewal.

## Laws that Apply to Maine Public Charter Schools (updated October 2014)

- All federal laws and regulations, including IDEA and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, FERPA, ESEA, Civil Rights
- Local ordinances
- Charter-school-specific provisions in Title 20-A, chapter 112, including enrollment process, performance expectations, renewal, external audits
- Department of Education Rule Chapter 140, including enrollment, records transfers, participation in state data system
- State assessment system
- Fingerprinting/criminal record check
- Freedom of Access law
- Conflict of interest law for school governing boards
- Health and Safety
  - Health screening,
  - Communicable disease control
  - Safe water supply requirements; Air quality, HVAC
  - School health services (school nurse, physician)
  - Sanitation standards
  - Safety (firearms, anti-hazing)
  - Prohibition on use of performance enhancing substances
  - School substance abuse services
  - State Fire Marshal inspection for Fire Safety compliance
  - Control of hazardous chemicals
  - Immunization requirements
  - School bomb threat procedures and reporting
  - Emergency management planning
  - Medication administration procedures, including laws and rules relating to administration of epi-pens
  - Safe and efficient transportation
  - Suicide prevention training
  - Concussion management
  - Bullying prevention
- State Human Rights Act
- Teacher certification (if not otherwise qualified)
- Collective bargaining
- Special education, including federal and state law and rule (MUSER)
- Nonreligious
- Military in uniform permitted in school
- Any other law made specifically applicable to charter schools

## Impact of Other Laws and Requirements (updated October 2014)

**I**n general, state laws that apply to school administrative units do not apply to public charter schools unless the law is made specifically applicable to them, or the charter school Chapter, Title 20-A, Chapter 112, includes reference to the law.

However, charter schools may be required by other mandates to follow the same or similar requirements as state law. Examples include the following:

- (1) Federal requirements such as FERPA apply to charter schools, so many of the Maine laws on student record maintenance and confidentiality apply to charter schools through the federal law and regulations.
- (2) The schools' authorizer (the Maine Charter School Commission) may include the statutory requirement in its contract with the charter school. This is the case with the requirement that students receive a diploma only if they have demonstrated proficiency in the 8 content areas of the Maine Learning Results and the Guiding Principles.
- (3) Guidance from the US Department of Education related to Maine's Flexibility (waiver) from NCLB/ESEA requires that charter schools be included in the requirement to implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems (performance evaluation and professional growth systems (PE/PG) under T. 20-A, chapter 508).
- (4) While the statutory process for student expulsion may not apply to charter schools, they are required to provide due process to any students who face potential expulsion, so they follow many of the same procedures as required by state law.

## Public Charter School Funding – per LD 131 (PL 2015 Ch. 54)

**B**ased on the passage of LD 131 in 2014, PL 2015 Ch. 54, the State Department of Education will make direct payments to those public charter schools (PCSs) authorized by the Maine Charter School Commission; local school administrative units will no longer make payments to these public charter schools.

The calculation of “each” public charter school’s subsidy will be based on a calculation similar to the public school administrative unit’s State Calculation for Funding Public Education (PreK-12) Report (ED279) and mirrors those requirements in current law for funding public charter schools.

### Public Charter School (PCS) ED279 Subsidy Printout:

- PCS EPS Per-Pupil Rates – will be based on the EPS Per-Pupil Rates of the student’s resident school administrative unit (SAU). For the estimated new students, the State Average EPS Per-Pupil Rates will be used.
- Student counts for funding allocations will be based on prior year October 1st student counts plus estimated counts for those public charter schools that have increased enrollment ceilings established by the Charter School Commission.
- PCS Operating Allocation will include allocations for students who are economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient and targeted funds (Assessment/Technology/PreK-2).
- PCS Operating Allocation will be adjusted by the same transition percentage as applied to the SAUs – currently 97%.
- PCS Other Subsidizable Costs will include allocations for students who are identified (IEP) as special education and if the public charter school is eligible, funding will also include allocations for transportation and gifted & talented programs.
- PCSs are not eligible for the following funding:
  - declining enrollment adjustments
  - isolated small school adjustments
  - debt service allocations
  - bus purchases.

## Other Funding:

- Special Education:
  - High cost in-district – additional allocation assigned to the public charter school because of a high-cost in-district special education placement in accordance with section 15681-A, subsection 2, paragraph B. *“B. For high-cost in-district special education placements. Additional funds must be allocated for each student estimated to cost 3 times the statewide special education EPS per-pupil rate. The additional funds for each student must equal the amount by which that student's estimated costs exceed 3 times the statewide special education EPS per-pupil rate;”*
  - High cost out-of-district – additional allocation assigned to the school administrative unit because of a high-cost out-of-district special education placement in accordance with section 15681-A, subsection 2, paragraph C. *“C. For high-cost out-of-district special education placements. Additional funds must be allocated for each student estimated to cost 4 times the statewide special education EPS per-pupil rate. The additional funds for each student must equal the amount by which that student's estimated costs exceed 4 times the statewide special education EPS per-pupil rate;”*
- Career & Technical Education (CTE)  
Cost of CTE education programs – a public charter school student's eligibility for and the funding of the student's career and technical education programming are the same as if the student were attending school within that student's resident school administrative unit.
- Transportation – If the public charter school is located outside the student's resident school administrative unit, the public charter school is responsible for ensuring that the student is transported to the career and technical education center or to a location from which the student will be transported to the career and technical education center by the resident school administrative unit, the career and technical education region or the career and technical education center.

Any estimated student counts will be reviewed and adjusted based on the fall student counts in the new school year.

The 3% payment for the Maine Charter School Commission will automatically be withheld from the Charter School ED 279 calculations and the Department will transfer these funds to the Maine Charter School Commission.

Payments to public charter schools will be made monthly July through June same as school administrative units.

**MYTH:** Charter schools are “stealing money” from the public school system.

**FACT:** Charter schools are public schools, therefore the money that follows the students who choose to attend charters remains in the public education system.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***What is a Public Charter School?***

Charter schools are public schools of choice that students can choose to attend as an alternative to traditional public schools. Maine's seven charter schools currently enroll 1500 students, a little less than 1 percent of the 186,000 public school students in Maine.

### ***How is a Maine public charter school different from a private school or a magnet school?***

Public charter schools cannot charge tuition or set admissions standards, as private schools and magnet schools can.

### ***Why are public charter schools good for Maine?***

Charter schools give families an opportunity to choose the school most suitable for their child's educational well-being.

### ***How are students admitted to Maine public charter schools?***

Public charter schools in Maine must accept any Maine resident student who wishes to attend. If there are more applications than openings, a lottery system is used. When a local school district authorizes a public charter school, enrollment preference is given to students residing in that district.

### ***Who can authorize Maine public charter schools?***

In Maine, there are two types of entities permitted to authorize public charter schools. The Maine Charter School Commission can authorize up to 10 public charter schools throughout the state during the first 10 years of Maine's charter school law. Local school boards, or multiple local school districts working collaboratively, also have the ability to authorize charter schools within their school administrative units.

### ***Who oversees a Maine public charter school?***

Public charter schools are overseen by the Maine Department of Education, the Maine Charter School Commission, and the school's own board of directors. Charter school boards of directors are not elected officials; rather, the school asks them to serve.

### ***How are Maine public charter schools funded?***

Charter schools are public schools; therefore, the money that follows the students who choose to attend charters remains in the public education system. No public charter receives more funding than a traditional school district. General education revenue must be paid to a charter school as though it were a district school.



### ***Can Maine public charter schools charge tuition?***

No. A public charter school may not charge tuition and may only charge such fees as may be imposed by other non-charter public schools in the state.

### ***Do teachers in Maine public charter schools have to be certified?***

Full-time teachers in a public charter school must either hold an appropriate teaching certificate or become certified within three years of the date they are hired. Teachers with an advanced degree, professional certification, or unique expertise or experience in their curricular area are exempted from the certification requirement. Charter school administrators do not need to be certified.

### ***What is a virtual public charter school?***

A virtual public charter school is a public charter school that operates predominantly through an online program.

### ***How are Maine public charter schools evaluated?***

The Maine Charter School Commission has three-member teams that visit each school to review data and report annually. The Commission is mandated to prepare a report on each school by June 30 of its fourth year of operation. If serious issues arise, the Commission has the authority to revoke a charter at any time or not to renew it at the end of five years.

### ***Do Maine public charter school students have to meet the same graduation requirements as traditional public school students?***

In 2012, the Maine Legislature passed a law mandating that all public school diplomas in Maine be awarded based on the mastery of knowledge and skills in eight content areas. The Maine Charter School Commission has made the proficiency requirements part of the charter contracts.

### ***Can students with disabilities or special education needs attend a public charter school?***

Yes. Public charter schools are required to provide special education services just like traditional public schools. All have special education teachers on staff.

### ***What is the role of collective bargaining in public charter schools?***

Public charter school employees are permitted to form unions and participate in collective bargaining, as any public school may do.

**More information is available at:**

**[www.maine.gov/csc](http://www.maine.gov/csc)**

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